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AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Habitat for Humanity forced to scramble

OUR VIEW: *Soaring land costs shouldn't undermine nonprofit's benevolent work.*

Habitat for Humanity International's recent trouble acquiring land at a cheap enough price so it can build homes for low-income families is a trend the San Bernardino affiliate is working hard to overcome.

In light of a real estate boom that has pushed lot prices toward the stratosphere, the local chapter is working with city redevelopment agencies and builders to keep the dream of home ownership alive for the many who need the group's help.

In the nonprofit's 31-year history, it has built 225,000 houses around the world — including 23 homes in San Bernardino County since 1994 — relying solely on donations of money, materials and services, and the ability to acquire land cheaply.

However, the recent premiums placed on Southern California real estate has forced Habitat for Humanity to get creative in finding new ways to buy up affordable land. The organization's San Bernardino affiliate has begun partnering with city redevelopment agencies and developers to subsidize costs for low-income families while meeting developers' need to provide affordable housing.

With six families on its waiting list, the area chapter negotiated with San Bernardino's redevelopment agency and AT&T, the former owner, for a parcel of land at the corner of 36th and E streets. The nonprofit now must raise the money to build a home there for a family of five before the end of June. Similar partnerships are producing new affordable homes in Redlands and Yucaipa as well.

Habitat for Humanity provides a valuable community service, and we are glad to see the agency's ingenuity in seeking to dodge exorbitant housing prices pay off for local families in need. We also are encouraged by the receptiveness that area cities and developers have shown in supporting such a valiant cause.

To donate cash, materials or services, call (909) 307-2362 or e-mail Habitat for Humanity San Bernardino Area at habitatsb@gmail.com.